



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

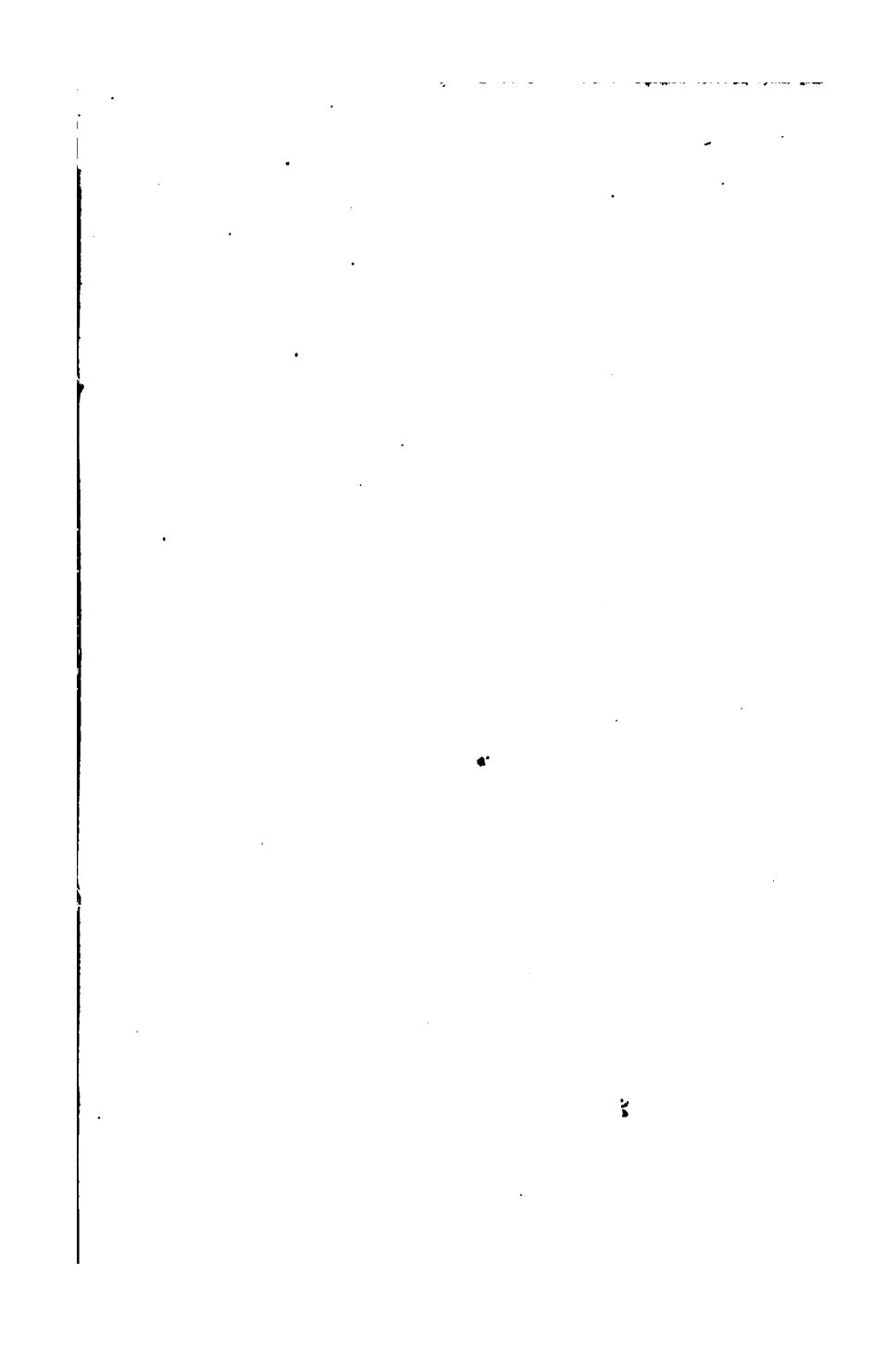
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

37.

116.







THE PRESENT STATE
OF THE
CONTROVERSY
BETWEEN THE
PROTESTANT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCHES.

BY
HUNTER GORDON,
OF LINCOLN'S INN, ESQ.

LONDON:
G. B. WHITTAKER AND CO.
AVE MARIA LANE.

1837.

116.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY T. BRETTELL, RUPERT STREET, HAYMARKET.



P R E F A C E.

WHETHER the Roman Catholic faith is, as some contend, making a sensible progress in this country, is, to say the least, extremely doubtful; and the fact difficult to be ascertained. The increase of chapels proves nothing, unless it be, that the rate of increase is not less among the Catholic, than among the Protestant population. But that there has lately arisen, in this island as well as on the continent of Europe, a prejudice in favour of some of the leading principles of the Romish Theology, and above all, a desire to effect a

combination of these with Protestant principles, must, I think, be apparent to every one. Whence this bias proceeds, I propose to consider in the following discourse. It is certainly a question of considerable importance, and worth inquiring into.

I begin by assuming, that the cause of this disposition is to be found in something within the pale of the Protestant Church, rather than in the active force of the Catholic Priesthood, or in any external cause whatever. Neither the rage of civil faction, which has often raised one hierarchy on the ruins of the other, nor the allurements of the Church of Rome, which in ages of ignorance were so powerful, could, in so advanced a stage of society, have produced this relapse, had not the principle of Protestantism been pushed to a dangerous extreme. It is to this point that the following observations are mainly directed. I shall,

therefore, merely touch on the present state of ecclesiastical parties; I shall briefly run over the common topics of Romish controversy; I shall hasten through the beaten ground of vulgar prejudices; and shall reserve a fuller illustration for that view of the Controversy, which alone merits a serious consideration in the present age of the world.

It may be proper to observe, that by reason, as opposed to faith, I do not mean that suspense of judgment which weighs the evidence of a Divine Revelation and assures itself of the divinity of the Christian Doctrine, before assenting to it; but that licentious spirit which, after it has been thus assured, continues to argue for or against the *subject matter* of revelation, on moral presumptions wholly inapplicable to a subject above and beyond the range of human experience. By faith I mean rather an act of the will, than the force of evi-

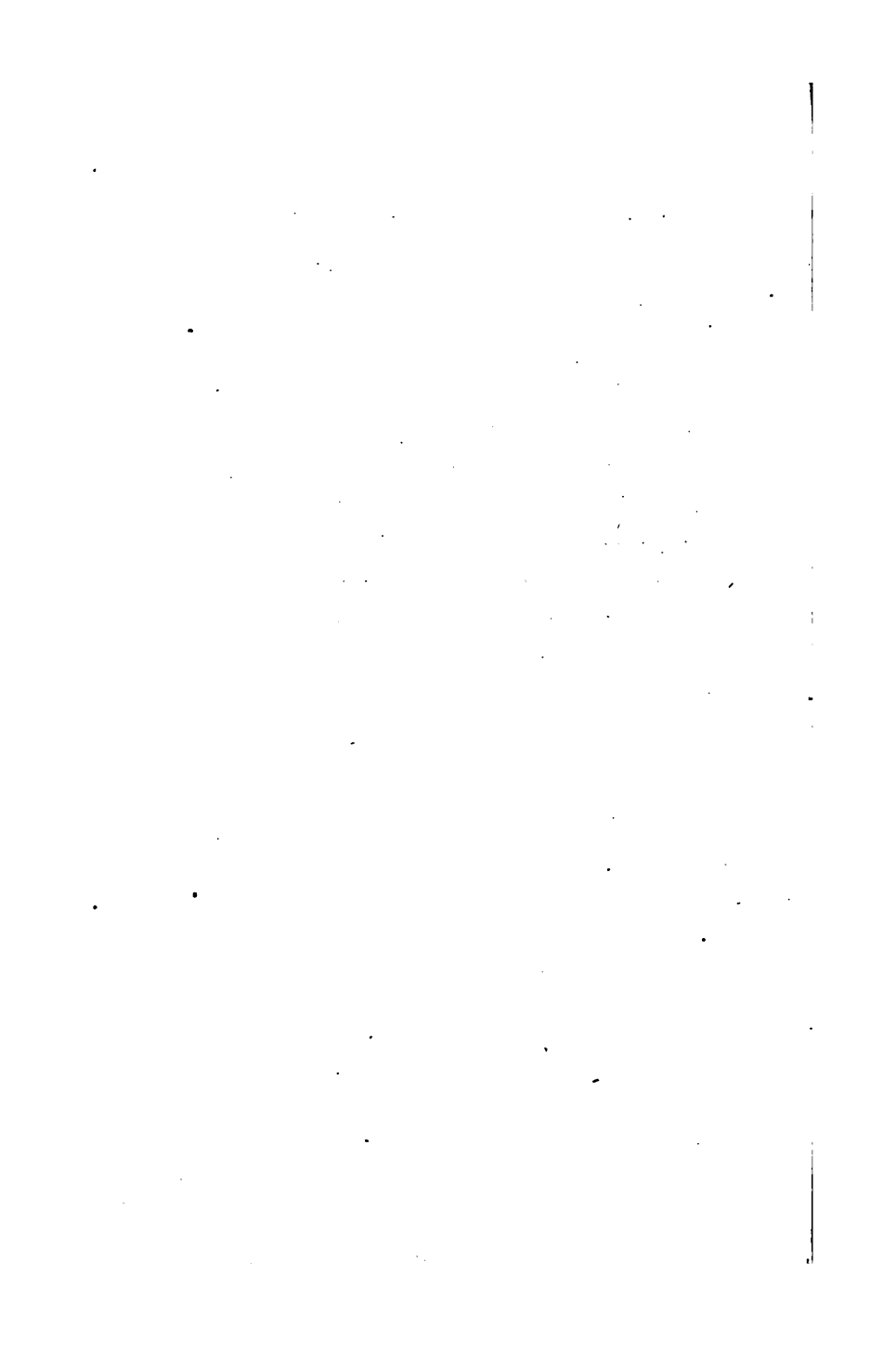
dence on the understanding, the mortification of those vicious inclinations which are the main causes of unbelief, and especially the resignation of that prejudice which makes human comprehension the measure of truth, its test, and ultimate standard.

However thick the veil of bigotry which blinded men in monkish ages, it may safely be asserted, that that spirit which is called in modern phrase rationalism, tends more directly to extinguish the light of the world, which even in Popish times, never altogether went out, and which in Catholic countries, in the present day, though obscured by profane rites, is living and burning still. But what is here said, is not insinuated in discredit of presumptions drawn from the comparison of God's moral government with the economy of the Gospel ; but is urged against inferences for or against those mysterious parts of revelation

to which no analogy can be traced within this visible theatre, and which are therefore simply incomprehensible. That human reason must be commensurate with revelation, is generally taken for granted as a self-evident proposition; whereas, even according to the common principles of probability, the presumption is, that a scheme revealed from Heaven, would be a scheme imperfectly comprehended by finite beings. This is the point with which Bishop Butler took such great pains.

1, *King's Bench Walk,*

Temple, June 15th, 1837.



THE PRESENT STATE
OF THE
CONTROVERSY
BETWEEN THE
CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT
CHURCHES.

IN all disputes, in which the passions are interested, but especially in controversies that engage the strongest passions which can actuate human nature, (I mean the hopes and fears of a future life,) it is evident that the matter at issue, as well as the mode of settling the question, is much influenced, if it be not altogether determined, by the state of the human

mind, and the actual capacity of reason and judgment, at any given period of human society. These hopes and fears, although their end and aim lie beyond this visible world, have yet their rise in the troubled breast of man, like the secular passions which never rise above earth; and like them derive their complexion from the elements which controul or agitate their source. The measure of civilization, the state of human knowledge, even the vulgar prejudices of the time, all these moral causes influence the sensibilities of man with respect to those great but distant interests, which are the business of Religion; and while their fluctuations afford some of the strongest evidences of the instability of this fabric of the world, they, at the same time, colour his prognostications respecting that future greater state which awaits him. And, although Divine Revelation has limited the aberrations of human reason, and has exploded many gross illusions which grew and multiplied under the darkness of natural religion; yet does ecclesiastical history evince, that men's views of revealed religion, and

their perceptions of the scheme and purpose of the Christian doctrine, lie under the influence of the same general causes; and that the state and condition of human society are almost decisive of the genius and spirit of that spiritual authority, which, in all its vicissitudes, and under whatever denomination, has so much obscured our common Christianity.

It is true, the discovery of one God, supreme, invisible, incomprehensible, the Moral Governor of the world, unknown and unacknowledged by his creatures; the record of a mighty propitiation, which not only expiates but restores; these have banished polytheism and its idolatrous train from a great part of the earth, and set bounds to the vain imaginations of mankind. Before these, all pagan rites have disappeared, and heathen ethics fled wherever the light of revelation is diffused. Yet even upon these, the discoveries of the Deity to mankind, does the age and body of each period in human society leave its form and impress: in one age, faith, through ignorance, lapsing into *Superstition*; in another,

reason, in the licence of its disquisitions, verging on *Scepticism*. Such is the force of the secondary causes, by which the generations of mankind are determined to those various views of Christian revelation which diversify the field of ecclesiastical history.

Nor is the investigation of these secondary causes, a fruitless, or, as some apprehend it, a hazardous inquiry. The whole analogy of nature, moral as well as physical, evinces, that no event or operation takes place by the immediate fiat of the Deity, but that every result is brought about by the operation of means, and through the intervention of established causes, which produce the intended effect by a certain and inevitable, yet also by a slow and gradual process; nor is there any ground, either from reason or experience, to conclude that the progress of Christianity, or the cause of the Gospel upon earth, forms an exception to this general scheme of government. And although Philosophy, in her moral researches, has sometimes hid the hand which gave the first impulse to these general causes, and which still upholds them in their courses;

surely this is the most wayward of all her caprices, since the same spirit of inquiry, which leads speculative reasoners beyond the visible phenomenon, should also lead them beyond the circumstance or cause to which they trace it. It is certain that in the vicissitudes of religious opinion, a regular mechanism is observable, and laws infinitely more complicated no doubt, but as fixed and general as those of motion. Certain theological principles have their periods like the heavenly bodies; like them revolve and return in their moral cycle; and with the return of the same concurrence of causes return the same opinions and animosities in distant ages. The light of Revelation is brightened or obscured by the revolution of empires. When barbarism fell upon the nations of Europe, and the Scriptures were almost lost in the general wreck of literary monuments, Christianity was well nigh extinguished in ritual observance and human tradition. With the dawn of literature the Gospel re-appeared. When Learning, aided by the light of revelation, dispelled the gloom of the middle ages, Superstition fled with it by

the very law of its nature; the authority of the clergy declined by a necessary and infallible operation. Nor was it a furious friar in Germany, or an imperious tyrant here, that caused the Reformation; but the necessary course of human affairs, established by God, accelerated, and perhaps disturbed, by these eccentric forces. Religious austerity, ascetic discipline, are the invariable concomitants of ignorance. A learned age places merit in speculative opinions. All these are linked together by an indissoluble chain; and each cause produces its effect with a certainty which may be calculated on as confidently as any physical result; to use Bishop Butler's illustration, as that the sun will rise to-morrow in a sphere and not in a square.

I thought this preliminary observation necessary, because many ignorant or inconsiderate persons have a superstitious dread of referring events to secondary causes, which will often be noticed in the following discourse, and place great merit in referring every event immediately to the supreme Being. Whereas secondary causes are the very essence of God's

moral government ; nor is it possible to suppose a moral administration without a fixed sequence of events, and the invariable connection of circumstances. If, while we mark the scheme and sequel of parts in the economy of redemption, we shut our eyes to the constitution and course of nature, the method which prevails through the moral order of the world, we lose the force of all those presumptions which their coincidence affords, in favour of Revealed Religion.

PART I.

MANY see, with surprise, the points in controversy between the two great divisions of the Western Church agitated in public disputations, and the revival of those animosities which distracted Europe in a remote age, while toleration was yet unknown. Political jealousy, and the rising influence of that party among us, no longer proscribed by law, which still adheres to the Church of Rome, as they were the immediate causes of these disquietudes, so have they been attended with more fatal consequences: they have degraded religion, made the Protestant cause odious, and made Revelation itself, the tool of interest, policy, and ambition. It is not to be denied, that the principles of the Reformation, since they became a weapon in the hands of enraged adversaries, have been extremely degraded

and obscured. Never, at any period of ecclesiastical history, was the purpose of Divine Revelation, or the spirit of Christianity, more absorbed by secular interests, or more lost in the various passions which are inflamed by these. The period of the civil war,—the period most nearly resembling the present age in the principles which were then at work,—was a time of trouble and confusion; Religious freedom had not yet blended the jarring elements of the constitution: Yet was the spirit of that age incomparably more favourable to true religion, than the temper of the present time, in the full maturity of civil and religious liberty. Religion did indeed mingle in the civil disorders of that era; but faith was the end for which men contended, not the weapon with which they fought. Theological rancour prevailed at that period; but even polemic divines maintained the principles of the Protestant religion with sincerity, nor sullied their genuine acrimony with fraud or hypocrisy. They practised not on the multitude, nor abused the levity of the people. The Parliamentary leaders

alone, and of these but a few, made religion the instrument of their ambition. The like observation is applicable to all the earlier contests which grew out of the Reformation; whether here or among foreign nations. Faith, then, seemed to authorise sedition, and to ennoble even the spirit of rebellion. Now, animosities disgrace religion; and faction discredits the very principle and practice of faith.

As far as regards ecclesiastical finance, or the mode of paying the Clergy, (very unfortunately for this age and nation, the great party topic of the day,) that is a secular question, and plainly inseparable from earthly passions of a gross nature. It is a question of taxation, and was sure to agitate the state, as other questions of taxation have ever done. It is a question of property and pecuniary interest; and if litigated at all, could not fail to be litigated with that rancour, sharpened by the stings of conscience, which almost always attends the taint of sordid interests. It must, however, be owned, that faction never took a more unhappy stand, than this on

Church lands and revenues. It has grafted fanaticism on economic rage, and, by the force of mingled passions, has given a deeper shade to the civil hostilities of the age. Posterity will long feel the effects of that rupture between the clergy and laity, which has arisen from this fatal dispute; and it may safely be asserted, that it has already inflicted, or, if longer kept open, must inflict, a deeper wound on the Established Church, than she could possibly have sustained from any partial diversion of her revenues.

Tithes, and ecclesiastical foundations of monkish times, are fair topics of political agitation between the two Churches. But that that portion of their differences which is purely theological, which relates to the nature of that mystery which the Deity has revealed to mankind, to the condition of its transmission, to the mode of its application, that the sacred and awful inquiry which respects the rule of faith and the limit of human reason in religion, the most momentous which can possibly agitate the human mind; that these which have nothing in common with the

scuffle for power and refuse all concert with servile ambition, should be the favourite weapons of party warfare, is a darker symptom. But, although the passions of men are the arms with which politicians fight, ambitious men cannot create these fierce elements: they find them ready armed and in motion. The source of the religious animosities, by which England is now agitated, lies far deeper than local politics, or the faction of the hour. Theology lies at their root; and it is the theological rancour so fierce and violent, that in past times has brought such cruel desolations in human society, which, inflamed by negligence in some quarters, and criminal designs in others, is again at work in these political agitations.

The time, in fact, had arrived (apart from occasional politics) for the return of the great question of faith and reason on the human mind; and the reflux of popular opinions from the extremes to which the Protestant principle of private judgment has been pushed in some quarters, would have appalled the alarmists, although civil faction had

made no outcry at the revulsion. Nothing in the history of the human mind is more clear, than the alternation of the two principles of religious belief, which we denominate Catholic and Protestant, ever since the Apostolic age. In one age faith fails; in another, reason decays, and credulity reassumes its empire, till speculation is again awakened by some exorbitant pretension, and running to excess, scatters again the seeds of superstition. Such is little circle of the human understanding; vibrating between faith and reason, and only reproducing when it seems to progress.

Amid these fluctuations of religious sentiment, the principle of toleration makes a desultory and uncertain progress. The disorders in human society, derived from so many opposite opinions, each followed by a popular current, seem rather to be on the increase in these later times; at least in this state, where the mixed and varied rights and interests of so many denominations distract the legislature, and keep up a continued fever in the domestic administration. The civil magistrate, sur-

rounded by enraged adversaries, finds himself placed in a situation of infinite difficulty and embarrassment ; and whatever party he embraces, stands exposed to nearly equal dangers. If he select any particular communion for persecution, discontent and disaffection arise on the part of the proscribed sect ; if he extend an unlimited toleration, he finds himself exposed to the jealousy and hatred of that communion which before possessed the ascendancy. To moderate their passions, to consult their prejudices, to adjust, and if possible to conciliate their rival interests, his efforts, though incessant, have still proved unavailing. Recent experience would almost lead us to conclude that Mr. Locke, who first established the principle of religious liberty on its right basis, had somewhat exaggerated the virtue of toleration as an expedient for allaying the fervour of contending sects ; and that great philosopher, whose genius gave him such an insight into all the mechanism of human society, had not sufficiently weighed the rage intolerance and the fury of religious animosity.

As far as regards the two great divisions of the Western Church, from whose theological differences arises the heat of the present fermentation, it humbly appears to me to be a question, not altogether unworthy of the attention of reflecting men, how far these are separated by such a diversity of nature and irreconcilable contradiction in principle, as to warrant, on the part of conscientious Protestants, that extermination with which the Roman Catholic Church is pursued by some. But without entering into this inquiry, I will venture to examine another which may reflect some light upon it, but which is a question of fact rather than of right; I mean the present disposition of men's minds with respect to the two great rival communions which divide the Western Church.

I BELIEVE the multitude begin to perceive, that which has been apparent to all thinking men ever since the Reformation, that in the long dispute between the two Churches there is something more at issue than appears in the topics which are openly agitated; and that the particular points of doctrine and

discipline, on which the whole stress of the argument is thrown, by the contending parties, are far from comprehending the whole matter in controversy between them. The public at large have begun to discover, that there is something latent in so protracted a contest, which neither of the parties to it choose to bring forward; some reserve which still recruits the vanquished, and robs the victor of the fruits of his triumph. It may be observed in general, that in public debates, whether civil or religious, the staple of the popular argument is seldom drawn from those views and reasons, whose prevalent force has really determined the parties to attach themselves to that side which they have embraced; and both dreading to hazard that conclusive reason, whatever it may be, to the brunt of discussion, the debate is by mutual consent thrown on topics more manageable, more pliant, it may be, more susceptible of rhetoric. This, however, must be confessed, that the Romish apologists, who have long been on the defensive, are more justly chargeable with this artifice, (if so it may be called)

than their Protestant antagonists; and that even the speculative theologians of the Catholic church, who appeal to reason, not to authority, have seldom brought into the open field those principles in which their chief strength lies, or opposed their genuine force to that of their adversaries. All the effective power of their theological system, the views of human nature on the one hand, and divine revelation on the other, which sway the hopes and fears of mankind, they reserve for secret invasion; nor hazard the delicate frame of their influence in the shock of a public encounter. Hence it is that these disputations are frequently but an image of controversy. The priest engages his antagonist in a puerile encounter, by which nothing is decided; or allures him to the ground of antiquity, where he is sure to have the advantage; or engages him in a desultory pursuit through those flowery paths which are to be found even in the wastes of ecclesiastical history. Meanwhile his main force is drawn off unbroken. Such is the general issue of these disputations.

In the present age of the world, the inference against transubstantiation is short and conclusive; rosaries afford an easy triumph; the discipline of celibacy is austere, unsuited to modern manners; both communions equally dread the confessional; nor do the doctrines of supererogation, penance, or purgatory, command the assent of any candid reasoner by the prevalent force of their own unassisted evidence. As to the fraudulent maxims and crooked policy, which sully some parts of the Romish annals, these are now generally understood to be an integral part of that mixed scene of insurrection and tyranny, which attended the fall of the Gothic government, for the better part of a century, acting on the Church, and not exempting ecclesiastical princes from that contagion which involved all the secular. The dreadful annals of the sixteenth century are no more chargeable on the Romish Church, than the romantic courage of the preceding age; which equally agitated the prelates and ministers of religion, and poured a monastic chivalry over the Teutonic plains. Every system, whether civil or

religious, which, like the Roman Catholic, descends through a vast series of ages, will contract, in the course of its transmission, many such hues and stains ; will receive and transmit the moral impress of many a generation. Ecclesiastical history catches and reflects the genius of an age, as strongly as the narrative of its civil transactions, and even more strongly, by reason of the delicacy of those subjects with which it is conversant. But it is the business of those who pronounce on the moral complexion of systems, to distinguish the accidental from the essential ; and it especially belongs to those who censure a communion subverted and decried, to separate its natural colour from the transient hues which collateral objects may have cast upon it ; and above all, not to mistake the glare which an age of blood shot on all the coeval institutions, civil as well as sacred, for the intrinsic qualities of that system, for spots belonging to it, or blemishes inherent in it.

It is no longer by dint of force or cunning, as in barbarous ages, that the Church of

Rome now prevails. Still less does she owe her apparent revival, to singular dogmas or mysterious opinions. Transubstantiation, for example, is not an idea fitted to lay any dangerous hold of a cultivated mind in the present age of the world. In reality, the tenets which the Church of Rome herself puts forward, as the tests and standards of her communion, are by no means the essential parts of that theological and moral discipline, which we denominate the Catholic Church. In framing tests, it has ever been found necessary, in order to bring the confessor up to a given point of orthodoxy, to extort something more than the desired; and although the superstitions of the middle ages may appear too high a standard, for this late and incredulous age, yet does the inflexible temper of that Church, founded on policy, regard any departure from these, as inexpedient and dangerous. The acquiescence of her own timid votaries in these legends, is loose and precarious; as far as regards those who are beyond her pale, they are absolutely null, in respect of influence

and authority. They are the colours of the sect, but nothing more; and although the conflict be thickest around these ancient standards, the struggle is no more for them, than is the battle in other fields, for those pageants round which the combatants rally. And, while to every judicious observer it is apparent that the Church of Rome is drawing her vigour and bulk, not from exhausted dogmas, but from a quicker root, from modern prejudices, and from principles more active and prolific, why waste upon the weak points of her system those forces, which, if directed against her more defensible parts, may not be found altogether superfluous?

It may be necessary perhaps to illustrate a little further the observation which I have here ventured to deliver, and which, though sufficiently obvious, is yet, perhaps, liable to some misconception. I am far from contending that the detail of the Romish ritual is not a fair object of attack; or, that each dogma, subversive of the sense and reason of mankind, should not be exposed in all its particular consequences. Nor can a

religious society, which persists in upholding such principles, and imposing them on the people, justly complain if these are eagerly laid hold of by her adversaries, as grounds for disowning her authority. Perhaps, however, the most effectual method of exploding such errors, is to open up their history and origin ; since this is a kind of evidence, which requires no previous postulate or concession, but to which minds of every persuasion are equally open. Thus, much of the didactic theology of Rome is plainly made up of the effusions of an age, when the minds of men were uninformed, when criticism was in its infancy ; above all, when the truths of Revelation had been so mutilated and disfigured by the stream of oral tradition which had brought them down, that their divine features could no longer be recognised. Nothing but the most assiduous culture could have enabled these delusions to survive the general promulgation of the Scriptures, or even the revival of profane learning. All the efforts of the human mind in other directions during the same period, wanting that protection which the interested

diligence of the Clergy threw around its religious speculations, have sunk into oblivion, or, are treasured only as monuments of its weakness. Theology alone, of all the learning of the middle ages, still flourishes, blends itself with the policy and legislation of modern times, and is the vital poison of human society at the present hour. Again, the main disorders of the Romish hierarchy sprung up under the feudal government, in the dark interval which divides ancient from modern story. While one dark cloud of ignorance yet overspread the western world, the legends which make so great a part of the Romish offices, and the canons which contain the most celebrated articles of her divinity, were promulgated. It was then, and not till then, that the pomp of Superstition overshadowed the spiritual worship of Christianity. A rite of expiation was ingrafted on the Christian ordinances; and a propitiatory sacrifice. The mass arose, and eclipsed, with the pomp of a solemn sacrifice, the finished atonement of the cross. As to her minor offices, the Church of Rome still

retains much of the porte and garb of the Gothic age; speaks much of its language in her public devotions; has all the credulity of a Gothic chronicle in her legends and martyrologies. All these corruptions and progressive depravations of the Christian faith, it is curious as well as instructive to mark: nor, provided the inquiry be conducted with that nice discernment which the shades of religious opinion, and the vicissitudes of ecclesiastical power, above all other subjects, require, can any more valuable service be rendered to the cause of truth, than to resolve the frequent, I had almost said the periodic obscurations of revealed religion (whether superstitious or fanatical), into those general moral causes, from which the mutability of religious, as of moral and political opinions, equally flows. Such a writer is Fleury, who, throughout his philosophical outline of ecclesiastical history, has maintained that sobriety which speculative historians have seldom preserved, and which even abstract reasoners have not always been able to maintain.

But those who, because the doctrine of the Romish Church contain many things which are plainly incredible, would thence infer that all her theology is obsolete, antiquated, and untenable; those who imagine she advances no principle that is not of gross and palpable absurdity; those who persuade themselves that, in exploding her fables and miracles, they have destroyed or even touched her vital part, have mistaken their enemy, and have not sufficiently considered wherein her effective strength lies. By her effective strength, I mean that principle, whatever it be, which, in defiance of argument, enables that religion to propagate itself; and though refuted, still to subdue the minds of the people. Experience proves that the reiterated refutation of her articles of faith has not broken her strength, nor visibly checked her progress. The fact, that our Protestant champions, notwithstanding their many triumphs, are still obliged to rest on their arms, and often return to the combat, is an evident and experimental proof, that in piercing the Gothic trappings, they have

not pierced the vitals of the Church of Rome ; and that under the imbecility of that antiquated form, there lurks a mighty antagonist, who draws his resources, not from manners, but from nature.

Had this system of religion consisted of those institutions only which supply the common places of invective, she had long since been undermined by the tide of human civilisation. Had she been built on the quicksands of local and temporary manners, her dissoluble fabric had long since been swept away by that impetuous tide. Involved in the same stream with chivalry and all the manners and usages of the contemporary age, she had left only the monuments of an extinct superstition. Her two main supports, during the ages of ignorance, have long since given way. The papal power, in its plenitude, political and religious, rested on two massive columns—the canon law and the school divinity. The one is now a heap of ruins ; the other is fast mouldering away. The canon law, the foundation of the hierarchy, the source of all the mighty prerogatives of

the Romish episcopate, has yielded to the stroke of time ; and that vast scheme of ecclesiastical jurisprudence, which had once well nigh swallowed up all the civil rights of nations, is itself now so merged in secular laws as to give only a faint tincture to modern institutions. As to the school divinity, and the subtlety of verbal syllogisms, in which the Gospel lay hid for ages, that also has fallen to decay ; and although it still lurks in monastic seminaries, it no longer forms a part of the European institution. Without some more solid support than these, no living relic of the Roman Catholic Church had survived to the present age ; like the Saxon and the Norman, her pageantry would be traced only in silent and desolate ruins. No pomp of sacrifice would now illuminate her mouldering walls ; her altars would stand without host or priest ; some rustic superstition perchance might mark the place ; and the tradition of strange rites and penances once performed there, would be all that now remained of Popery.

The changes which the revolutions of

human learning have, from time to time, introduced into the speculative system of this church, have made small impression on her ecclesiastical polity and practical discipline. The vicissitudes of other schemes afford a striking view of the permanence of this. The school divinity, which we have just mentioned, was a fabric artificially reared by monks, in order to support and cover that scheme of spiritual dominion which had suddenly reached an exorbitant height. When the metaphysics of Thomists and Franciscans, thin and dark, began to fail, and let in the dawn of letters, the Jesuits wove a polemic system of much closer texture for the hangings of the same sanctuary. The apologies of Bellarmine, without abandoning Aristotle, presented the ancient principles and prerogatives of Rome, aggravated, as by that time they were, by the canons of Trent, in a form more adapted to the genius of the age than the sums and sentences of the old Dominicans. Bellarmine himself is now sinking into oblivion; and the old political system of Rome, so often transplanted, is, ere while we write, about to be

ingrafted, hale and unbroken, and with all its sap and verdure fresh about it, upon a more vigorous stock, and a purer soil. As long as she struck her roots in the soil of Gothic barbarism, many spurious suckers sprouted around her; and she threw out many baleful branches of prerogative. Since the elements of modern society swept away these vicious excrescences, and by reducing her to the proportions of a spiritual dynasty, compelled her to rely on her spiritual resources, she has again begun to look formidable.

As she stood against the vicissitudes of the school divinity, so has she also stood amid the fluctuations of the school philosophy, and the moral and physical systems which superseded it. She subsisted together, and incorporated herself with the Peripatetic Physics. The first rise of the Cartesian illusions, which scattered these, gave a momentary shock to the hierarchy, by destroying in part that implicit submission to ancient authority, on which it was founded. She has witnessed their fall; she has survived the

elegant and inventive genius of Des Cartes, as she did the authority of Aristotle; and now subsists in harmony with the Newtonian system, as she once subsisted with the Ptolemaic spheres.

Again, compare the duration of this religious system with that of the form of civil government which was coeval, and grew up together with it, side by side. The theology, I may call it the polytheism, the form and mode of public devotion, the ascendancy of priestly discipline; these, which are the exterior and visible parts of Popery, are as little congenial with the present age, and as little compatible with the spirit of modern society, as military fealty, or any other custom of the feudal monarchy. In spirit and conception, the scheme of worship is as rude as the scheme of civil policy; both alike disproportioned to the present growth of the human understanding. Both were the faint and disfigured rudiments of a more perfect system; both, therefore, were equally transitory in their nature. The tales and chronicles which amused the infancy of the one, are not, in

their own nature, more shortlived than the legends and miracles in which the other was nursed ; nor do the superstitions of that age contain in themselves any principle of vitality, which should protect them from the disuse and oblivion which has fallen on its secular institutions. But mark how unequal the periods of these kindred institutions. The civil state of the Gothic age has long been dissipated, its heraldry defaced, its vassallage dispersed. The pageant alone of its religion still flourishes in great permanence and lustre. Breathless crowds still throng her pictured halls ; the ceremonial of her antique masque is unchanged ; the same chaunts and figured vestments which drew the eyes of our armed ancestors, still fill the gaze, and lead the adorations of modern assemblies ; she spreads and propagates, and enlarges her dominion, and multiplies her partisans ; and far from declining, as human society recedes from the age of traditional lore, and leaves behind it the credulity of a legendary ritual, she seems to expand with the progress of the mind, and spread with the tide of civilization.

It is therefore an inquiry worth prosecuting, what is the living principle which sustains the Church of Rome under this load of ceremonies and antiquated theology? Wherein consists that vitality which baffles, not only the demonstrations of theologians, but the stroke of time itself? We are told that it is the religion of human nature. An unmeaning generality! equally true of every sect that is rooted and diffused, alike applicable to the most abject superstition, and to the excesses of the most recent fanaticism. Neither of these could live a day without flattering some vicious appetite of the human heart. Some degree of adaptation to human nature, it is evident, must fall to the lot of every religious system which endures for any considerable period among men; nor can any scheme of theology long support itself, which does not repose on one or other of those general passions which operate with nearly equal force in every period of human society. With regard to the Church of Rome in this particular, it is self-evident, that the fragile superstructure which fills the eye, and seems

to compose the whole edifice, owes all its stability to some durable material which it shades, and conceals under the decorations and legends of a fantastic age, a solid fabric of infinite duration, and of permanent, because of universal application.

In what respect is this particular scheme of religion congenial to the nature of man? Wherein lies its affinity to his hopes and fears, which allures the temperate mind, and subdues those who turn with equal disgust from the presumption of scepticism, and the more odious presumption of enthusiastic self-love in the guise of religion? This comes closer to the real question. Relinquishing, therefore, all that is accidental and extrinsic in this complicated subject, let us examine its vital principle, and survey this famous controversy under that point of view in which alone it admits of a serious inquiry in the present age of the world.

Nor is it the part of candour or of prudence to dissemble the strength of an adversary, while we look only on what is weak or

assailable in his position, and wilfully shut our eyes to all that is dangerous or defensible.

The Romish theology, under cover of much sophistry and monkish casuistry, contains principles of religious belief of much plausibility and authority, which must ever exert a great influence on many moral constitutions; over some, an entire ascendant. The continuance in the church, down to the present age, of that apostolic authority, supported by miracles which attended its first institution; the transmission and actual existence on earth of the same heavenly light which first illuminated the inspired messengers of the Word, still revealing and diffusing eternal truth to mankind; these are illusions, obnoxious indeed to ridicule (from which nothing sacred is exempt), yet so true to nature, so congenial to a serious mind, and, I will venture to add, in their own nature so little unreasonable, that it is no wonder if all the argumentation which successive ages has directed against them, has not much diminished their authority. Nor will the rage of the fanatic, or the sneers of the

sceptic, or even the voice of Reason herself, ever suppress the recurrence of so natural a sentiment. Could demonstration explode it, the delusion would still remain, as that irrefragable chain which proves the non-existence of matter is dissipated by the instincts of nature and the evidence of the senses. But when a prejudice, thus powerful in itself, thus venerable by its antiquity, is fostered and enforced by all the solemnities of an Institution so august and awful as the Catholic Church, is inculcated by its ministers, canonized in its confessions and offices, impressed on the imagination by pomp and splendour, on the heart, by the most tremendous penalties, what wonder if it be moulded into the mind, and blended with the inward frame of her votaries?

Again, so undefined are the limits of faith and reason, so incontrollable the presumption of human vanity, that, when to these are added the evils resulting from licentious speculation on revealed truth, and the danger of error or even of vacillation there, we cannot be surprised, if a form of Christianity,

which affords a remedy for that class of errors, should have drawn the attention of mankind. Much more will a system, the very end of whose constitution it is to yield a sovereign antidote for these ills, attract the regard of every one who feels himself exposed to them, whether by the strength or the weakness of his understanding. That authority which the Church of Rome assumes, that implicit submission which she enjoins, promise repose to the understanding, and *seem* to ensure to man an exemption from the doubt and uncertainty which attend all human reasonings; but which, in religious inquiries, are ever attended with so painful a solicitude. No doubt, nor hesitation, with anxious fears, appear to disturb the tranquillity of those who walk within that pale; no glimpse of wavering steps. She promises, she engages to reconcile the penitent to his offended Deity; she points out the path of life, but indulges not for a moment the licence of human disquisition, or the caprice of individual predilection in aught that regards the final destinies of mankind. Her discipline

meets their irregular affections at their source, imposes its awful mandate on their profane curiosity; appals their wandering imaginations, and, in a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of their passions, calls upon them to tremble and believe.

These are views of theology, to which the progress of fanaticism and of philosophical scepticism, equally render the minds of men susceptible; to their prevalence the Church of Rome owes her existence; by them chiefly she is able to perpetuate, and to extend her power. In these general views, supported by indolence, lies the strong antidote which supports the Romish Church against all the ridicule and invective which are aimed at her ritual and hierarchy. These are maxims which strike deep; these, and not the scenic pomp of the Romish liturgy, are the illusions against which to fortify the breast; and instead of assailing the feeble dotage of the school divinity, or waging a tedious lingering war on the relics of exhausted credulity, whether St. Dunstan or St. Dominic, the only expedient from which we can

hope for success in our enterprise against the Church of Rome, is to march up to the centre and strength of the system, to the principle which excludes the operation of the reasoning faculty from religion. That point once gained, the victory in minor positions will be easy. From that station we may extend our conquests to those frontiers and outskirts on which we now so uselessly hang; but till that fundamental position be shaken, it is vain to hope that the missal of Rome can be purified, or a single ceremonial of her antique masque retrenched.

But, it may be observed, that several causes have concurred, in the present day, to add new force to these principles, and to work a considerable change in the sentiments of men with regard to the Roman Catholic Religion, in general.

Of these causes, the first, and the most important, because that without which none of the others could have operated at all, is the destruction of those associations, derived from certain passages in the constitutional history of this country, which, for two cen-

turies, led the people of England, not only to view the Roman Catholic Religion with disapprobation as a theological system, but to regard it with the utmost jealousy and terror, as an engine of arbitrary power. That violent antipathy, peculiar to England, had its origin in the struggle between the princes of the house of Stuart and the Parliament, but more particularly in the complexion which that struggle assumed, from the religious persuasion of the race of princes who swayed the sceptre of England during the whole period of its rise, progress, and final issue. Every one knows the state of England both under Charles I. and his flagitious sons. Oppression, levity, and cruelty on the part of the monarch; faction, sedition, and rebellion on the part of the people, compose the history of that miserable era. But what gave a peculiar virulence to these civil disorders was, that all the violations of law proceeded from princes who zealously attached themselves to the religion of Rome. Prerogative, tyrannical and cruel, at that time threatened the people from a Catholic

magistrate. Here, then, began that association, long indissoluble between Popery and arbitrary power; and the multitude, blind to the ancient monuments of English liberty, and mistaking, as usual, a simply collateral circumstance for a cause, traced all their grievances to the religious prejudices of their monarchs, and ascribed to the Romish theology what was plainly the effect of an ill-balanced government, in which law and liberty were not yet adjusted. From that moment the poison of political jealousy envenomed the natural animosity of the two Churches, and inflamed it to a pitch, which theological rancour, always implacable, never reached in any other country. This antipathy, already sufficiently strong by the obstinate adherence of the Stuarts to their faith, was carried to the last pitch of rage and fury, by the attempt of the last of that arbitrary line to impose his principles on the nation, and the convulsion into which that misguided prince threw the civil government. Insomuch, that from that time hostility to Popery became the point of honour among English states-

men, the very test of civil worth, and the watchword among legislators and ministers of every class and character, even among those who knew nothing of the Protestant religion, nor could tell in what the principle of the Reformation consisted.

All this is now pretty well changed. The altered situation of civil affairs gradually extinguished the former antipathy which prevailed against the Church of Rome, and served to mitigate extremely, the jealousy of that communion, even among those who were not yet able to surmount their prejudices. The triumph of popular principles at the Revolution beat down arbitrary power; the Hanover succession secured the nation against Popery; and that mighty hierarchy appeared thenceforth the obscure remnant of a proscribed and vanquished communion. Thus was dissolved the association of tyranny with the Church of Rome. From that period, the people, freed from their anxious fears, began to look upon the Roman Catholic faith as a theological system, to survey its doctrines without

horror, even to look into its interior economy, and to examine with calmness, and even with curiosity, that ecclesiastical polity, which had wrought such mighty revolutions in human affairs. Exempted from those terrors which almost bereft their ancestors of reason, men no longer keep the principles of the Reformation steadily before them, nor hold fast the grounds and reasons of the Protestant religion. It must be owned that the trials of that age, though much too violent, were favourable to Protestant principles, and contributed to prevent that supine indifference, through which Protestantism is, in some countries, tending to passive tradition; a state, into which all popular religions, when long quiescent, sink. The best systems are found to sicken in the stagnation of a continued calm. This great change has taken place in the public mind, within the memory of the present generation: but it has been much accelerated by the view which the present age has witnessed, of the Romish Church in alliance with popular principles.

The abatement of these political appre-

hensions has been followed by another circumstance, which has operated still more powerfully in the same direction, and which has a direct tendency to reconcile men's minds to the ancient mother church. I mean the extreme to which reason and inquiry have, in some quarters, been pushed in the present day, and the actual state of theology in some of the countries, which were most forward in their zeal for the principles of the Reformation.

Protestantism, whose just boast it is, to have set reason free from the fetters of ecclesiastical authority, is not a fixed or stationary principle. On the contrary, it is in a state of rapid and irresistible progression: nor did it stop short, or rest content with that measure of liberty of conscience which the Reformation established. Each age, still carried the right of private judgment further than the preceding; the progress of the human mind in this respect is very sensible since that great revolution in the religious opinions of Europe; and it is only within the memory of the present age, that the minds of men, both here and on the continent, have begun

to pause in their career of discursive reasoning and speculation, and to revert towards faith and authority. Symptoms have even appeared, of a disposition to revert to the other extreme. It is difficult, no doubt, to discern the first beginnings of change in public sentiment with regard to any subject; and even after the current has actually turned, the progress in the opposite direction is for a time so slow and insensible, that, until it has begun to run with some rapidity, it is unsafe to pronounce with confidence respecting it. In religion, where the limits on either side are extremely delicate, and where the minds of men are often conducted by trains of thought imperceptible to themselves, it is almost impossible to discern the first rise of a popular current; and the desolations which it produces in human society, often present a remarkable contrast to the feebleness of its beginnings. But if we cast our eyes towards the neighbouring continent, and particularly to the Lutheran provinces of Germany, we may obtain a view of the same causes,—which, in this country are as yet but faint,

obscure, and not easily definable—in an advanced stage and in full activity; and may read, in the state of that country, which was the cradle of all the Reformed Churches, the destiny of our own.

For this purpose, the reader will excuse a brief digression (hardly a departure) from the immediate subject of this discourse. Since the decline of materialism in the European schools, and the fall of that Cartesian Atheism which was first stated, certainly first expounded and methodized by Spinoza, there has been a sensible reaction in favour of religion; and speculative reasoners,* in their moral and metaphysical discourses, have begun to appeal to primary principles more reconcileable with the responsibility of man, more consistent with the moral government of God, and more consonant to the precepts of Divine Revelation, than the maxims which prevailed almost without interruption, from the time when what was termed free-thinking first superseded the ancient scholastic theology. In Germany, the doc-

* See the writings of Cousin *passim*.

trines of materialism never made great progress, being resisted by the genius of the nation, and especially by the great influence and authority of Leibnitz, in whose writings may be found the germ of all that succeeding philosophers have advanced; and that contemplative people, whose ethereal spirit first burst the chains of papal superstition, were not likely to fall under a grosser and more impure delusion. But spiritualism had on them a more pernicious effect, than ever had materialism on any other people; and the reveries in which its abuse has plunged them, together with those philosophical contemplations respecting the nature and essence of the soul, which it has substituted for religion, have well nigh effaced the record of revelation, brought back the fantasies of natural religion, and almost buried Christianity in a species of Platonic enthusiasm.

These two species of philosophy, the material and spiritual, stand in diametrical opposition to each other; and as the practical effect of the former is to depress the views and debase the affections of man, so does the latter tend, when much dwelt on, to

elate his presumptuous hopes, to swell his soul with great but confused conceptions regarding its own nature and essence, and to remove all bounds to the wanderings of human imagination, by infusing the most exalted notions of its spiritual powers and capacities. It is easy to conceive that such dispositions, operating on a people of a genius exceedingly bold and adventurous, still flushed with their early triumph over spiritual authority, and animated by an excessive passion for uncontrolled inquiry and speculation; I say it is easy to conceive that such principles, let loose without restraint upon the mysteries and miracles of Christianity, would be productive of fatal consequences. And it was natural to expect, that the nation which first broke the holdings of ecclesiastical dogmatism, would be driven furthest from them. Curious without science, indefatigably empirical, but guided by sentiment rather than philosophical induction; such is the character of a people to whom a dogmatic theology, narrow limits, and an immovable, if not an infallible barrier of spiritual authority were almost indispensable, in order to secure them against making shipwreck of

faith. It is well known that for many years past there has been no declaration of faith, no standard of orthodoxy, nor restrictive power on the teaching of the German Protestant pastors—a fact, to which a learned and able writer* traces the wide fluctuations of religious opinion in Germany; whereas, this fact is itself only one of the effects and indications of their licentious genius, and an evident proof of some radical defect in their views of Christian doctrine.

From these causes it has happened that forms and modes of religion, some fanatical, others philosophical, have sprung up in the Protestant portion of Germany, exhibiting a wider departure from divine truth than the worst delusions, however unscriptural, idolatrous, and superstitious, of the Catholic church, by how much the denial of the divinity of the Christian doctrine is more pernicious than any depravation of it. Compared with these speculatists, the theorists of Pagan education and genius who distracted the infancy of the church, the Gnostics, under whom the primi-

* Mr. Rose.

tive Christians were running fast towards natural religion (if such the dogmas of Zoroaster and the Magi may be called), the Arians and other Alexandrian sophists were sober thinkers, and cautious reserved inquirers. In short, Protestantism in Germany runs into two wide extremes, which are arrayed against each other; nor is there any medium between the sophistry of a cold and sceptical logic, and the reveries of a disturbed imagination. The collision of these principles was signalized by the controversy between Lavater and the Prussian doctors at the end of the last century.

But of these extremes thus flourishing side by side in Protestant Germany, it may be observed that both tend, the one directly, the other circuitously, to relapse into the ancient mother church.

And first, of Mysticism; it must be acknowledged, that this abuse of the doctrine of the spirit is not peculiar to the Protestant church; witness De Sales, Fenelon, and above all the famous German Dominican Tauler, whose writings Luther commends in a celebrated

passage. But what is peculiar to the Protestant church, is the extravagant height to which this delusion mounts in that communion, freed from all control of ecclesiastical discipline. In all the various forms of contemplative devotion which abound in the Lutheran and reformed churches of Germany, from the sober and benevolent society of the United Brethren, who engraft monastic rites on the confession of Augsburg, to the Quietists, who, wrapt in pleasing vision, protract their useless existence in immoral or at least in barren raptures; the same principle is still apparent, a wayward imagination, unregulated by the Scriptures, unfixed by any standard of theology, unmoved but by its own casual, variable impulse. All the peculiar doctrines of Revelation, these extacies leave far behind them. Of God, as the Moral Governor of the world, and Judge of man, they acknowledge not the moral administration; and while they still pursue the phantom of some mysterious incorporation with the Supreme and invisible Being, whose plain and authoritative communication of Himself declares Him to be the Judge of

nature, they hide from their eyes every thing in that record which can violate their self-complacency, or dissipate their profane illusions. The idea of retribution for the deeds done on earth, the basis of the whole scheme of Christianity, the energy of the divine attributes elucidated in the sacrifice by which that retribution is averted, that vengeance which the Deity declares to be His; these are notions distasteful to their etherial natures, and fatal to their delusive repose. All is presumptuous rapture and vain imagination. For these they relinquish all sacraments and primitive institutions, whether symbols of grace or monuments of the life and death of Christ; for these they abandon all exterior observances and decent order of worship, as the beggarly elements of a sensible and visible sanctuary; and bent on the contemplation of the invisible essence, disclaim even the obligations of morality as retarding their imagination and quenching the fire of their philosophical devotion.

Now it is the nature of such contemplations not only to unfit men for the practical duties

which religion and the world we live in equally enjoin, but when the fire of fanaticism is spent, to corrupt and debase them. Nothing lays men so open to superstition as this elevation and presumption, pushed to extreme by inquiries beyond the cognizance of the human faculties. Not even ignorance gives them up so completely disarmed and bound to any form of ecclesiastical power, however uncouth, which may steal upon them in the cloak of sanctity. Whoever looks into the foundations of the papal power, will perceive that its rudiments were laid and cemented in a material of this kind, distempered, no doubt, by the gross credulity of a barbarous age. The secrets of the physical world only baffle the genius of those who would explore them. But the sublime obscurity of the Christian dispensation instantly strikes blind the vain inquirer who would draw off the veil from its mysteries. He now reaps the dismal penalty of his profane curiosity, doomed for ever to the fervors of fanaticism, or the sullen bigotry of superstition; and prejudice, driving at once from both these opposite quarters, makes ship-

wreck of his understanding. Nor if reason perishes, does it avail whether she is benighted in the gloom of superstition, or is lost in the blaze of mystic enthusiasm. In both cases the heart is darkened, in both, all reasonable service is at an end.

To the presumption of such licentious enthusiasts, the sober mind, the penitential spirit, the reverence for ancient authority, tempered, not chilled, by philosophical genius, which have long distinguished the Roman Catholics of Germany, present a contrast which might engender candour even in the bosom of bigotry. But while many were relapsing, at the view of these delusions, into the ancient church, and others were suspended between fear of the one and insurmountable jealousy of the other, there arose another evil in the same country, which fixed their persuasion, and terminated their inward struggle. I speak of Neology; beyond all question the darkest cloud that has fallen upon the church since the first promulgation of Christianity: the device the most subtle and diabolic that

ever God permitted man to deface the record of revelation withal.

Neology is a form of religion which stands in diametrical opposition to the principles of the Church of Rome, and at the other extreme. Protestantism and the true principles of the Reformation occupy the mean between these. Neology makes human reason the absolute judge both of Creator and creature, excludes faith from the whole business of religion, and vests in the operation and results of reflection that supremacy which the Church of Rome imputes to her canons and traditions. The divinity of the Christian doctrine some Neologists deny in terms: but the principle advanced, or rather strenuously contended for by all, that the Christian system is not fixed and unchangeable, but is perpetually undergoing modification and extension, according to the advance of human genius, places it beyond a doubt that they consider Christianity as a moral and theological scheme of human origin, in short a system of natural religion. The source and origin of Neology is that

optimism, or the notion of infinite perfectibility and constant progression towards perfection, which has long been the idol of German theorists, civil as well as theological; an illusion splendid, and harmless as long as confined to the secular interests of the species, but subversive of the first principles of revealed religion.

The root of the whole evil lies in a vicious extension of the principle of the Protestant religion. The Reformers enlarged, or rather created the right of private judgment in religion, by bringing the sentences of ecclesiastical assemblies and their interpretations of the Scriptures, hitherto held sacred and unimpeachable, to the bar of reason. The neologists demand that the Scriptures themselves should be brought to the same tribunal, and her authority established as sacred and decisive. They maintain that it is impossible to set bounds to the province of reason; that she cannot stop short at the point defined by the Reformers. It is vain, they contend, to limit the jurisdiction of reason by a fluctuating line of demarcation, which so dis-

cursive a principle must ever hastily and unknowingly pass ; vainer to pursue her into the wide and variegated field of theology ; nor is there any medium between unreserved submission and absolute freedom.

Employing these topics, which they press with considerable force of genius, and more considerable learning, the Rationalists have propagated their principles with great zeal and success in all the regions of Protestant Germany ; have beat down faith ; exploded miracles, resolved the peculiar mysteries of Christianity into the maze of allegory, and so discredited the inspiration of the apostles as to leave among the Reformed Churches only an indistinct tradition of a divine revelation, like that which spread a faint light over the Gothic ages. But what renders this new and strange species of infidelity so dangerous is, that it has the form of exegetical theology, and reaches the mind through the medium of Scriptural exposition. The churches, the altars of Germany diffuse, this contagion ; and the Lutheran liturgy, though purified from invisible deities, ascends to the

Deity of human reason. In other countries deism is the part of the fastidious or the vain, who love to contradict any prevailing sentiment, and place a pride in appearing to resist that evidence which subdues the multitude. In Germany alone, atheism flows from the theological chair ; scepticism occupies the pulpit ; the rude, unconscious multitude, who come to pray, imbibe the impious speculation, or, straying in quest of new pastures, are driven within the pale of that ancient mother church, whose outstretched arms are ever ready to embrace her backsliding children.

Had this mode of thinking and reasoning been the first outbreak of the human faculties from the coercion of a long slavery, some licence of speculation might be looked for in the first essay of untried powers, some intemperance in the exercise of a new and unaccustomed franchise. In this light, the monstrous excesses of the Westphalian Anabaptists, when Protestantism first appeared, admit of some palliation. But the present sallies of the German Reformed Churches, are not Saturnalian ; this is no sudden exuberance

of intellectual energies long bridled suddenly bounding into liberty, and breaking off their collected fervour by an excursive flight and headlong career round the curriculum of theological speculation. For two hundred years the Protestants of Germany have enjoyed the utmost liberty of conscience; the civil magistrate has protected them in the pursuit of every inquiry, in the indulgence of every imagination respecting the purport of divine truth; insomuch that there is hardly a scheme of doctrine or model of discipline, or combination of doctrine with discipline, which they have not professed, practised, and propagated. Yet does free examination still run riot, rising every day in its excesses; a certain proof that this is no occasional ebullition. But whether it proceeds from something peculiar and unaccountable in the genius of that nation, or be the result of the want of due limitations in establishing the Protestant principle, the world is still too young to determine.

In France, Christianity underwent an eclipse amid storms and the earthquake of popular commotion; but that tempest,

like the convulsions of nature, soon exhausted itself, and left a calm and serene air, in which churches and crucifixes are again arising. In Germany, the same effect is now taking place, but with another scene; there night descends in a calm: but the stillness with which the clouds and darkness fall, is the prognostic of a larger and a deeper obscuration.

Of this delirium of private judgment and free examination, the inevitable consequences are too obvious to require argument or illustration, *viz.* a sudden and violent revulsion to the Roman Catholic principle of implicit submission, and the absolute resignation of all private judgment, reason, and inquiry. With those who love metaphysical disquisition, and those who inherit from nature, or derive from education, a taste for theological speculation, the process is short, provided their moral sentiments are high, and their abstract reasonings overawed by religious veneration. Entangled in the speculations of Rationalists, often on the very brink of natural religion, they desire some authority to which they may submit themselves, and

would willingly resign their judgments and even their principles of reasoning, to the most dogmatic theology which could advance any just claim or pretension to authority in controversies of faith. The snares of an infallible Church easily beset a contemplative genius thus shaded. Such a mind, if the vital spirit of religion be kindled in it, not unfrequently finds itself involved in the same illusions to which stupidity exposes the dull, and credulity the ignorant. Powerful minds, as they are unaccustomed to doubt, and impatient of any thing like obscurity, so do they experience a peculiar solicitude when they fall short, in their religious inquiries, of that assurance, which, upon all other subjects they have ever been accustomed to attain, and find, with inexpressible mortification, those faculties of such keen discernment in all secular affairs totally powerless to dispel the clouds that hang over their great, but distant interests. Finding their anxieties rise with their investigations, and that they are only plunged in fresh perplexities by the ardour with which they push their researches, they fear to follow where reason would seem

to lead, and are often the first to abandon altogether that dangerous guide. Vigorous understandings are, like bodies in florid health, susceptible of more piercing pains than those of more languid powers; and as they often start difficulties which escape the rest of mankind, so are they liable to disorders from which these are exempt. Such a man, wearied with irresolution, goaded by the stings of conscience, dreading every moment some fatal error in his religious opinions, yet forced on some determination, declines on ancient authority and the consent of ages, in which sentiment and imagination alike concur. The multiplied disputes around confirm his resolution, and in the continued dissensions of so many ages, he finds an irrefragable argument of the inadequacy of private judgment to those sacred and awful subjects. The wretched disorder and weakness of the human faculties reduces him to despair. Astonished by the incomprehensible mysteries of Christianity, but more astonished by those horrors which scepticism presents to his view, he throws himself into the arms of superstition, and embraces the

most monstrous principles, as a refuge from that solicitude which can find no repose*.

Such is the effect of Rationalism, which ensnares the soul. Thus, erring reason exhausts its active powers.

Now that the Protestant population of these Kingdoms is infected, in any thing like the same degree, with either of the principles which are now prevalent among the reformed Churches of Germany, it would be absurd to assert. But that both of these causes are at work in this country, as well as others, tending in the same direction, it is impossible to deny. Among the very small number who, in England are favourably disposed towards the Roman Catholic faith, two classes may be noted: those who venerate revealed religion as the word of God, and those who prize Christianity chiefly as the cement of civil society, and as an indispensable support to the authority of the civil magistrate. The latter, actuated by a predilection for antiquity, by a quickened, and perhaps exagge-

* "Rest then my soul! from endless anguish freed," &c.

The lines are very beautiful: but it is doubtful whether Dryden's conversion to Catholicism was real.

rated alarm at the fluctuations of public opinion on all subjects in the present day, above all, by a sense of the need of some control, or holding, to steady the popular mind, are half inclined to entrench themselves within the unshaken traditions of the Romish Church, as the only firm ground left whereon they may fix their footing. The former party, with higher views and a deeper impression of religion, yet fatigued with controversies unsettled, and despairing of any relief for their anxious doubts, cast their eyes towards the same object, but with fear and jealousy. It is difficult to catch, more difficult to embody, trains of thought so fine as those which sway the religious sentiments of mankind, more especially where, as in the present case, they are as yet, only floating in embryo, or press in so gentle a reaction, as to be scarce perceptible by the mind which lies under their influence. But this, their earliest stage, is that in which it is most important to obtain a steady view of such impressions. We shall begin with the views of those who are biassed towards this, the Romish theology, by certain

mistaken, though conscientious views of religion. These are better defined than the other; and as they attract and concentrate certain floating prejudices, so do they possess a greater degree of consistency. The following seems to be the train of reasoning, or rather reflection, which this class indulges.

Surely, say they, the dread of spiritual authority, and that immoderate zeal which is affected by some for the unlimited exercise of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, is only another instance of the incurable weakness of human nature, which, placed between opposite dangers, still muses on the retrospect of those that are past, and is incapable of extending its views as new perils present themselves, and the certain presages of an opposite crisis arise. The calamities which false religion has hitherto brought on mankind, have been of one species only, *viz.*, disorders introduced into civil society by the ambition of priests, and ignorance of the truth, proceeding from the weakness and inactivity of the human understanding, and its undue submission to a

particular order of men. Of a different class of evils, those which spring from the presumption of human reason and the defiance of all authority, the world is still too young to have afforded examples of any magnitude. The human race has but recently emerged from superstition, whose province it is to diffuse a universal lethargy among the people; and the active powers of man, the excess and intemperance of which are the vice of a very advanced stage of society, are now for the first time let loose. The sophists who sprung up in Apostolic times, and vexed the primitive Churches in Greece and the lesser Asia, where the human mind was undoubtedly in a higher state of activity, issued from the schools of heathen rhetoric and philosophy, were not numerous, and were seduced into their errors by a supposed analogy between their own mystic theology and some of the mysteries of Christianity. Gnosticism (Asiatic Rationalism) was obscure and fanciful; the reign of Arianism was longer, and more troubled. But it may be observed of all the early

philosophical heresies, that they were either the dregs of expiring Paganism, or the last struggles of exhausted reason, closing the reign of natural religion upon earth; and there is this distinction between these heresies, and that progressive speculation which is now at work among the reformed Churches, that the former were only attempts to reconcile the sages of antiquity to the doctrines of Revelation, whereas the latter goes directly to invalidate the evidence, and even to impugn the divine origin of Christianity. It was reserved for modern times, and for the present age, to pluck the last curb from human reason, and to let her loose on the mysteries of religion. Rationalism is but just entering on her wild career. The age of faith and implicit submission is gone; the reign of prelates and spiritual princes is past; already that lordly race lies prostrate. Curiosity, temerity of research, leading on to universal scepticism, are the ascendant principles. But however palpable these signs and portents, men, blind and unconscious of their

real danger, look to every other quarter, as if no vicissitude of things, or change in the genius of human society, could ever bring round any other evil than the bigotry of superstition. And, although dangers may be foreseen to flow from philosophical scepticism, as real as any that have ever resulted from the blind submission and reverence of former generations, yet do the ignorant multitude still direct all their apprehensions to the theology of these rude and simple ages; while those who foment these prejudices sound the vain alarm for the maintenance of the right of private judgment, and stun the present overactive and curious generation with the same cry with which Luther awoke the slumbering nations in the sixteenth century. Surely, implicit faith is not the besetting sin of human nature, nor an easy credulity the only infirmity of mankind. The Scriptures hold another language, while they represent unbelief as the curse of the world, an obstinate incredulity as the malady of the species, the source of all mortality and corruption. With many minds, to

reason is to doubt ; argument is the suspense of judgment ; and those who are the most assured of the truth of revelation, have reached their conviction by the submission, rather than by the activity of their faculties. Can it be denied that the disputatious humour which many now labour to foment, with that zeal for speculative principles in which all idea of moral obligation is lost, besides its licentious tendency, has led men wider astray from the spirit of Christianity, than the erroneous doctrines which they regard with affected horror, and have landed many in principles subversive of all religious belief, and of the very principle of Divine Revelation ? Dogmatism, it must be confessed, exalts the dominion of priests, and bigotry is the parent of ecclesiastical usurpation, evils, without doubt pernicious to human society as well as to religion, and, above all, extremely obnoxious to popular rage and clamour. But are there no disorders of the like nature to be apprehended from the licence of human opinion, no longer guided by any standard ? Or, if it

be admitted that there are such, and that we are reduced to a choice of what errors or excesses we shall condemn or bear, do the ancient evils of tacit acquiescence so manifestly outweigh our modern dangers, as to be, in the eyes of all reasonable men, the only object of terror? Such was perhaps the case during ages ignorant and barbarous; but such is not the genius of our age, nor this the present danger with which to alarm the nation, and kindle the zeal of the populace.

All modern ecclesiastical history, continue the same reasoners (and none more than that of the country which took the lead in the Reformation), proves that that mode of theology which is denominated Protestant, contains a seed or gem of scepticism, which is every hour unfolding, and which, once expanded, must of necessity burst the feeble texture which envelopes it. Supine credulity reigned in Europe for 1000 years, and wrapt Christendom in universal gloom. Have we any ground, from experience, to conclude ourselves secure from as universal a prevalence of unbelief with

all its concomitants? Have we any warrant of Scripture to infer, that the revolt of reason will not waste as widely, and rage as fiercely, and extend its dark and troubled reign as far, as ever did that mighty hierarchy which once held reason in chains, but now lies itself in ruins? Is the extreme of reason without faith less dreadful than the extreme of faith without reason? What right have we to take it for granted that the world may not be reduced back to that state of uncertainty, suspense, and amaze, in which it was plunged before the light of Revelation had yet absorbed the sects of human philosophy, and, founding the Christian church on their ruins, established the reign of faith upon earth?

The Church of Rome (whose antique pomp and fantastic exterior so terrify men, that they are afraid even to look upon her face) affirms one principle which is worthy of attention, and rears her whole discipline upon it. This principle is, that the presumption of human reason is the sole obstacle to the power of divine truth; its subdual, the essence of all religion; a maxim founded in truth. The

methods alone which she employs, in order to break this pride of intellect, are blameable and criminal. In bending the obstinacy and confounding the sophistry of human reason, she contracted her inflexible temper, and learned to practice many severities, and even barbarities, which recoiled on herself, and gave a fatal wound to her spiritual influence and authority. The view of human nature, however, on which she proceeds, though much exaggerated in theory (as well as abused in practice), has its foundation in truth, and is in some respects peculiar to herself. She not only, in common with every other form of Christianity, contemplates human reason as incapable, by the frailty and perverseness of its nature, of steering her course or limiting her excursions, and in imminent danger of being driven into the wide and trackless waste of natural religion. She goes much farther. She regards the whole system of human analogies, presumptions and associations (which we call argument), and which furnish the whole sum of human discourse, as lying so far below the mystery and scheme of Redemption, that they

are inapplicable to it in the least degree; and contends that the human mind must remain absolutely impervious to the impression of divine truth, until subdued and abased to the condition of the most passive reciprocity. To question, compare, convince, and confute (which we call exercising private judgment), as in the common operations of life, she considers not merely to be a breach of that unity which is the cardinal virtue of the church, but a state of mind incompatible with that faith which Revelation enjoins, and that submission of the human faculties which is the condition, nay, the very substance of faith. Other theological systems, while they enjoin the assurance of faith, yet indulge their votaries in a rash curiosity, and tolerate disquisitions in which their most momentous convictions often hang, in trembling uncertainty, on the inclination of that moral mechanism whose wheels and balances are so often warped by caprice, or clogged by interest, or broken by passion. It is the boast of this scheme, that it lays the axe to the root of scepticism, and crushes in its seed the rebellious principle. Other schemes

of religion are content to control the passions, or lay their restraint on those gross instincts to which reasonable beings are enslaved in common with the brutes. But reason, the master and arbiter of these, is itself in need of a master and arbiter ; and that noble instrument, the regulator and governor of life, is itself a principle in the highest degree headstrong and ungovernable. To curb the struggles, to quell the ardour of that discursive spirit, a discipline is required, compared with which all sensual mortifications are light. Self-control may master the passions ; fanatic penitence has eradicated the appetites of the body, and made even the natural affections expire in the bosom of youth. But to curb the flight of imagination, to wither the vain glory of genius in its bloom, to mortify the intellect in its strength, and to subdue all the faculties of the soul to mute acquiescence in the authority of that ordained ministry through whom the doctrine of life has been revealed and diffused, this demands a moral coercion more rigorous in its impositions, and beyond all comparison more painful in the

specific nature and character of its abnegations. These are the peculiar objects which the Roman Catholic Church has ever proposed to herself; to effect these ends she bends all her energies and resources. In this arduous task she is deterred by no difficulties, and thinks no proposition too strong, no dogma too repugnant to be imposed, provided she can thereby confound the obstinacy of the human understanding. All her discipline she bends directly on reason; nor ever dissembles that the subjugation of that principle is the great end of her spiritual ministers and confessors. The incongruity of her tenets is the medicine of her disciples; their incredibility works their humiliation; and he who has embraced principles so subversive of all human prejudices, carries in his breast a sovereign antidote against all minor scepticism. That very incredibility signalizes more strongly the triumph of her moral discipline, which, excluding the idea of credible or incredible, excludes all reference to a human standard.

It is not then (pursue the same reasoners) theological dogmas which the Romish Church

imposes, or mysterious opinions for their own sake, so much as a mind capable of receiving these, and the moral discipline which is the condition of their reception. It is not a system of divinity didactic or polemic, but that resignation of all argument which implied in the idea of faith, as contradistinguished from that suspense of judgment, which necessarily attends the progressive operation of reasoning; that open and awakened bosom which pauses not to withhold its assent till it has measured the proposition by its own standard of probability, but receives what is incomprehensible, and when it can no longer reason, adores. The incredulous soul revolts against this contrition of intellect; men of unquiet minds, who think no evil so great as the abatement of the active powers of man, insist on impugning whatever resists their prejudices; but this implicit submission is the child of penitence and the view of a violated law. This passive temper is the parent of all devotion; and even when mingled with error, is more congenial with the Spirit of Christianity than the contentious orthodoxy and theologi-

cal rancour of the speculative sectaries. Delusions are incident to an infallible church ; policy may pervert its discipline ; but if it have implanted the principle of faith in the hearts of men, the main difficulty has been surmounted. But this salutary principle, dangerous in its excesses, the Church of Rome carried to an extreme ; and by abusing the confidence of the people, by propagating credulity, enslaved and corrupted that flock whom she thus violently rescued from scepticism. Yet such is the native force of the principle, that though debased by superstition, perverted by secular interests, disfigured by antiquated bigotry, and even sullied by cruelty, it has yet been able to surmount the prejudices to which these have exposed it, and to assert its genuine authority.

Others, pressing on the same point, carry this train of thought still farther. It is evident, say they, that the ultimate end of religion is the regeneration of the species, and the restoration of the human affections, alienated and averted from their great and original object. To this end the doctrines of Christianity are wholly subservient ; to this

its worship, and the whole train of its rites and institutions ; nor are these ordained for the propagation of speculative principles, but to embody the mind and will of God, and to diffuse on earth the spirit of penitence and obedience. Even the apostolic reasonings and the sacred writings are not, as some would seem to suppose, ultimate objects of human contemplation, but means, secondary and subordinate, to the renewal of the human mind ; and derive their importance, as well as the best evidence of their divine origin, from their power over the affections, and that regenerating influence which they exert on the mental frame and constitution. As this transforming energy is what mainly distinguishes revealed truth from the philosophic theism, as well as from the theoretic morality of man, so is that transformation the sole end and design of the truth which the Deity has revealed to man, and authenticated by miraculous attestation.

Such, protracted perhaps to an unnecessary length, is the train of ideas by which many are unconsciously conducted towards the

Roman Catholic rule of faith. The heart once biassed by these views, and the mind enervated by these general apprehensions, the admission of particular tenets and articles of faith is easy and natural. It is the dread of that doubt and uncertainty which attend all human reasonings, but which in religious inquiries is ever attended by so painful a solicitude, the necessity under which the human mind lies of believing something, above all, the apprehension of some unknown and perhaps more uncouth heresy, filling up the place of the ancient religion of Europe, which have begun to turn men's eyes towards human authority, and once more to seal up the living oracles, or at least to intercept their heavenly light by the standards and legends.

This apprehension, once arisen, like all other fears, propagates itself by contagion, meets an auxiliary in the indolence of mankind, and is disseminated by that mixture of truth which it contains. Thus the ardour of Protestantism languishes in the bosom of the church; all Christendom feels the relapse;

and the principles of the Reformation decline in every region. Meanwhile, ecclesiastical authority displays the standard of infallibility, the idol and pageant of the multitude in every age; to that banner flock all the unstable and ignorant. Antiquity appears in more than her usual charms, as men feel themselves entering on unknown scenes; and they look on primitive ages with an eye of sorrow, as their monuments are obscured by distance or fade from the view.

The heart once biassed by these fears, and enervated by these general apprehensions, the admission of particular tenets and articles of faith is easy and natural. How vain to combat in detail each dogma of the Romish Church, when the master principle, the only defensive security against its incursions, is left behind, and the heart uncovered by reason, falls an easy prey to bigotry! In vain will you urge by reason him whose fundamental maxim it is not to examine or inquire, or even triumph, in every altercation, over him who has previously made an unreserved surrender of his judgment. It is too late; he has

already imbibed the venom of implicit faith in man ; the subtle poison has reached his heart, and unnerved every sense and organ ; his wavering sight can no longer discern truth from falsehood, or the unreal creations of a distempered brain from sensible manifestations. In the continued distractions which attend the relapse to superstition, the decisive step is the subjugation of reason by fear, and the resignation of all those powers, upon which, in spiritual as well as in temporal concerns, conviction hangs, and persuasion is either confirmed or confuted. The priest knows well, that upon a mind, in which reason is thus arrested at its source, and all the intellectual processes brought to a stand, logic can no longer perform its office, nor demonstration do its work. He cares not to defend particular tenets, nor thinks of contesting specific articles of faith ; nor dreams of purgatory ; nor wastes a thought on the arguments for or against transubstantiation. He stops the proselyte before he has got so far, he arrests the first movement of his intellect.

Nothing was ever gained or lost on either

side of the famous controversy, by confirming or confuting particular dogmas. These follow the fate and issue of the general question, the applicability of reason to Revelation. That giving way, the breach is made; and the whole rabble of delusions pours in, in one undistinguished mass. No one was ever deterred from embracing the religion of Rome by the absurdity of her mysteries, or the extravagance of her dogmatic tenets.

And first, the dogma of human infallibility, when stated in this abrupt and naked form, presents insuperable obstacles to every reasonable inquirer. But those whose faculties are paralysed by terror, soon seem to discover that this dreaded tenet is only the repulsive shape which Jesuits and Italians have given to a very salutary principle; that it is merely an exaggeration of a very familiar preposition; in short, one objectionable mode of stating those views and that train of thought which we have endeavoured to expound above, and which they had already received and imbibed. And they

find, with surprise, that what they had hitherto mistaken for the exorbitant pretension of an ambitious and overgrown prelate, is only an absurd and impolitic mode of inculcating the submission of human reason.

It is true that this tenet of infallibility has often been deduced, by professed theologians, from abstract principles, and that by a variety of processes of reason, by no means consistent with each other, a circumstance deserving more attention than it has yet met with. Thus, those who extravagantly exalt the Bishop of Rome above Councils, conceive, very systematically, that his infallibility is necessary to that monarchical constitution which the Church early assumed, and absolutely essential to the maintenance of that sceptred supremacy which adorns the long gradation of ecclesiastical authority and episcopal government in the Catholic Church. Others, and among them the illustrious Malebranche, contend that infallibility is of the essence of a divine institution, and must necessarily reside in some member or organ of a Church, which derives its origin from

heaven; while Bossuet and Fleury, with the freedom of the Galican Church, deny it to be any part of the original frame of the ecclesiastical constitution, and deduce it from the canons of certain modern councils.

But it is certain that the bulk of mankind are little swayed by arguments so refined as these, which, however attractive to men of leisure, and contemplative genius, are altogether unfitted to propagate a popular system, or diffuse themselves among the multitude. The real foundation of this practical institution is the dread of perplexity, the love of that tranquillity in which credulity reposes on the lap of imposture, and the horror of those mortal animosities which spring from theological controversy, dissention, and faction.

In like manner tradition, and the unwritten word, find an avenue through the passions. The very sound of these words causes a thrill of horror in the trembling proselyte, to whom they are propounded in terms. But in the disposition into which he has been previously wrought, he soon feels

ashamed of being terrified by a verbal illusion, and learns to look upon an undue latitude in the interpretation of Scripture, as the only real danger. Here also the mixture of truth perplexes him. The sacred books, consisting of a collection of miscellaneous pieces, some epistolary, some historical, but no where containing a systematic statement of that sum of doctrine which is only to be gathered from every part of them, it has ever been found necessary, in order to establish a standard of orthodoxy, to form summaries of the purport and effect of Divine Revelation. What better mode, says the Church of Rome, of effecting this end, than to take with the sacred books, that body of interpretation with which ecclesiastical antiquity has surrounded them, that stream in which they have been borne down to us, whether it consist of oral tradition or immemorial discipline, and which forms a running or collateral commentary illustrative of the holy text, and almost incorporated with the sacred canon?

Nor does it escape their views, that the most remarkable examples of intellectual

self denial, and submission to ecclesiastical authority, have still been found among men whose powers of thinking and reasoning elevated them above the rest of the species. Such was the principle which pervaded the life of Pascal; such, but carried to the pitch of gloomy enthusiasm, the self-control which chained down the philosophical genius of Malebranche, and threw those sublime geniuses, the glory of Catholic Europe, into the same prostrate attitude with its most vulgar votaries. Eminently speculative and discursive in their genius, they both, the one in his polemical writings, the other in his metaphysics, incorporated philosophy with religion; but with reverence for its mysteries, with awe for the hierarchy, and with implicit submission to that visible authority which their Church maintained and obeyed.

According to these views, the two great divisions of the Western Church are not separated by any irreconcilable difference in principle, but are only distinguished by their respective predilections for different parts of a common system. They are only different

modes of applying the same remedy, revealed by heaven, to the ruined constitution of man. Both proclaim the same Deity ; both point to the same cross. The object they pursue is the same—to smooth the path of life, and illumine the dreary prospect of approaching mortality.

The Protestant Church, considering man rather as an intellectual than an active being, attaches itself mainly to points of doctrine, and endeavours to regulate his sentiments through the medium of his understanding, rather than by directly addressing his affections. It undertakes to satisfy the jealous scrutiny of unbelief ; it sets before man, in a systematic form, his relation to the Deity ; and by analogies drawn from every part of creation, by appeals to his experience, by the analysis of his moral constitution, labours to reconcile his judgment to that theological system which revelation offers to his assent. It is rich, not only in controversial divinity, but in philosophical theology, illustrated by the largest views of the Divine Administration, and by the harmony of the whole

scheme of the universe, as it lies before us in this visible world, or has been revealed by miraculous attestation. As the subtilties into which it frequently falls, necessarily engender differences of opinion, and schisms are unavoidable in such abstract reasonings, it has not always been able to escape controversy, or maintain the unity of Spirit.

The Roman Catholic religion regards man rather as an active than a reasonable being; and applying itself directly to his heart and affections, prefers practice to speculation, and discipline to dogmatic theology. It is a practical system of control, rather than a scheme of theoretic principles; and far from undertaking to satisfy the rational and philosophising sceptic, it stifles his inquiries in their birth. It turns men's eyes towards a future world, not so much by a regard to their great interests, and by maxims of a cautious prudence, as by alluring their imagination, and by so disposing the scenery (if I may be allowed the expression) which revelation presents to the view, as to break the fascination of temporal scenes. Penitence

is ever its frame, while it rebukes with indignation the wanton triumph and security with which profane and presumptuous mortals present themselves before the Moral Governor of the world. But policy made it assume an austere mien in many of its monastic orders ; superstition threw its ascetic hue over all its penitential rites ; and its moral expression is lost in that antique and almost barbaric air which it has contracted in its exceedingly long transmission through so many rude ages.

The Protestant religion engrafts the fruits of the Spirit in theological systems, which often spring up and strangle them. The Roman Catholic cultivates particular affections, for the most part without sufficient depth of earth.

Of those who are swayed by political views, and by the present aspects of society, in their adherence to the Church of Rome, as a religious system more congenial to ancient institutions, and to the mingled dynasty of Church and King, than that unlimited exercise of private judgment, dissent, and

disputation, which is the principle of the reformed churches, the number is far smaller here than in the European continent. There are not, however, wanting, even in England, persons whose hearts are biassed by these sentiments. The following is the form in which this train of prejudices arises.

It is evident, say they, that a spirit of change pervades the minds of men in the present age, far more active as well as more general than at any former period. All things bespeak the instability of this fabric of society, and its rapid and irresistible progression to some unknown and untried form, nor can the most sanguine eye discover the end of change, or any apparent limit to that career of innovation in which the state is involved. The stream of events and opinions which has broken in upon us, it is no longer possible to control; and men only wait to see whether it will bend its course. The passions of the multitude no longer lie under that degree of restraint which the institution of government, which the submission of the many, requires; the views of popular leaders

are uncertain. Both are inflamed by the writings of theorists, whose doctrines are are loose and vague, beyond all former example; and who are as much at issue respecting primary principles, as were the philosophers of Greece two thousand years ago. No specific grievance inflames the general discontent, as when the spirit of the nation was roused by encroachments on liberty, or attacks on religion. Yet does this animosity descend more deeply into the mass of the people than any former faction or rebellion, provoked by the most desperate projects; the poison of political fanaticism has seized the dregs of society; and the subordinate ranks of the people being torn by the same broils which exasperate faction among the great, the whole social system is vitiated, corrupted, and disorganised. While a vein of disaffection, running through the sectaries, extends as widely as their diversified religious denominations, and renders every sciolist in church government, a schismatic in politics and civil allegiance. This inveterate disorder, it is continued,

has its origin in the popular mind, not in any external cause; and the remedy must be applied there. It is the adoption of human reason as the only rule of conscience, and the exclusion of every other principle of action, which is the distinguishing prognostic of the present day, and threatens such extensive consequences. It is from the dissolute state of popular opinion, no longer stayed by those fixed maxims, which, in all former periods, restrained, within some certain limits, the levity of the people.

In past times, even of trouble and confusion, there were certain landmarks, which remained immoveable amid the variations of opinion, some limits within which the disorderly affections of the human frame still vibrated; some axioms derived either from sacred authority or moral sentiment, which gave a fixed sphere to doubt itself, and bestowed a species of constancy on the speculative licence of former ages. But in our day the principle of establishing every thing by the unassisted force of human understanding, and of rejecting every thing which it cannot by

that unassisted force establish, has left nothing standing within the limits of human speculation. Government is founded not on force, but on popular opinion; and when the foundation on which it rests, fluctuates so wide, can we wonder if the fabric nods, and breaches begin to appear? The mind of the people is on the verge of universal scepticism in politics as well as in religion; a state of mind from which there is but one step to the fury of the passions, and to that enthusiasm which ever attends an attack on established institutions.

Nor is it difficult (continue the same reasoners) to trace this lawless frame of mind to its source. In the long struggle, which ever since the Reformation has been agitated between Faith and Reason, the latter has rapidly extended her empire, and has made such deep encroachments on the province of Faith, as to circumscribe, within very narrow limits, the influence of authority in political as well as in religious concerns. Authority, which, rather than private judgment, is manifestly designed by the condition of humanity to be the great

principle of thought and action in the world, has been almost displaced from the popular mind by the ascendant which the latter principle has reached, engrossing the whole conduct of human affairs. Great and manifold as are the blessings which the world has reaped from the Reformation, the seeds of this presumptuous spirit were then sown, and even the fruits foreseen by the great men* of that age. And as Protestantism has failed in the long result as a branch of police, and as far as regards the temporal interests of society, in not affording such a degree of unity on fundamental points, and that reverence for established authority, without which the institutions of government cannot support themselves amid the fury and injustice of the people; so is it apparent that sufficient checks or safeguards were not provided either to religion or civil society at that era; and that, although faith was not absolutely abolished, nor reason formally enthroned as the only divinity, yet her supremacy in human affairs was, in effect, established by that great innovation. Pure rationalism, as it is fatal to religion, so is it destructive

* Erasmus and Sir T. Moore.

of civil institutions ; and the obvious interests of society require that reason should be tempered and overruled by other instincts, which are as much a part of the moral constitution of man as reason herself, and whose supremacy no force of argument can shake off ; and although government is *founded* on opinion, not on force, yet opinion is moulded of many elements, and consists not alone of abstract principles, but of the force of association, of reverence for antiquity, and of many other instincts and internal principles, from whose steady and uniform action popular opinion derives whatever stability it possesses as a mean of action or basis of institutions. But religion is the soil in which these affections flourish ; and religion is the foundation of civil society, not so much in virtue of its positive injunctions, as of the general tone of sentiment which it diffuses. But of all forms of religion, the Roman Catholic is the most conducive to the stability of actual establishments. Authority is the all in all of the Romish Church ; antiquity and prescription are its banners ; and the rule of Vincentius, which

affirms the authority of tradition, is as applicable to states as to the Christian Church.

While truth is thus mixed with error, religion with secular interests, no wonder the wavering mind labours, vacillating between the restraint of reason and the impulse of prejudices.

The sum of the whole is this, that it is no predilection for the mysterious dogmas, nor passion for the forms and shows, nor affection for that potentate whose apostolic pretensions crown the Romish hierarchy, nor even the fascination of ecclesiastical antiquity (although that were a more reasonable prejudice), which has inclined men's hearts towards the Church of Rome; on all these points they have been long disabused. The active principle, whose prevalent force thus sways popular mind, is the dread of unknown heresies, the dread of losing all firm ground where they may fix their footing. Far from being biassed by the allurements of Rome, they feel themselves between two undoubted evils, and only prefer the fixed to the fluctuating fallacy; and the remedy is no longer to expose Romanism,

but to vindicate Protestantism; no longer to attack faith in authority, but to secure reason against sceptical speculation.

To conclude, the Church of Rome, deprived of the secular arm, and despoiled of sacerdotal pomp and power, collects her inward might, and by standing forth in the strength of abstract principle alone, has taken a firmer position than she has occupied for some ages. The Protestant Communion, exhausted by controversy, and weakened by the enthusiastic excesses of its schismatics, has not only lost the vantage ground on which it stood on the morning of the Reformation, but has begun to stagger under a very considerable superincumbent weight of error.

PART II.

THE situation of the Protestant Church has, therefore, undergone an important change since the period of her active struggle with the Church of Rome; and as she now stands exposed to opposite dangers from those which then beset her, it is obvious that a corresponding change in her mode of warfare must necessarily follow. In the vigour of her age, she carried her offensive force into the heart of her enemy's kingdom: she now labours under internal disorders, and is reduced to defend her walls.

When the English Clergy of the seventeenth century assailed and overthrew the Romish Apologists with their massive erudition, there still survived in the minds of many, amid all the antipathy to Popery, a

tender affection for the religion of their forefathers ; and lingering there, had tainted the zealots themselves, and even spread the contagion abroad, had it not been stifled by the ponderous arms of the English prelates. At that time, the Church of Rome prevailed, where she prevailed at all, by her own strength, not through the weakness of the rival communion ; and whatever success attended her, was the result of her intrinsic force,—while men still venerated her discipline, were attached to her doctrines, or found support and consolation from the spiritual ministry of her priests. While that state of things continued, the Protestant writers very properly conducted the controversy upon an offensive principle, and employed their forces rather in making attacks on the doctrines, rites, and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, than in maintaining, affirmatively, the principles of the Reformation.

But of late years the sentiments of men have undergone a remarkable change, with respect to this important question ; and that bias towards the Church of Rome which is

observable, flows from principles in some respects new and unprecedented. It is a certain distrust of the principles of Protestantism, if I mistake not, rather than any positive predilection for the Church of Rome, to which the present ascendant of the latter is to be ascribed; it is the temerity of private judgment, discrediting reason, which has weakened the principle of the Reformation; an intestine enemy, far more dangerous than any assault from without. Now, under these altered circumstances, and the very bulwark of Protestantism trembling to its lowest foundation, it is the obvious wisdom of those who would maintain the interests of the reformed Church, rather to repair and strengthen their own stronghold, than to carry the war into the quarters of the enemy.

The root of the whole evil lies in the omission of the Reformers and their immediate successors, to establish and define the province of right reason in religion, when strengthened yet benumbed by the slumber of ages, reason arose. Their fiery temper, and the genius of that age, rendered them, with the exception of

Calvin, fitter to demolish than to construct. In their zeal to overthrow the Papal power, and to explode the particular articles of faith on which it rested, they left their own system uncovered at one capital point; or rather, they omitted its very corner-stone; I mean the use and abuse of that reason, which they had restored to liberty.

Mr. Locke was the first who gave Reason her proper place in the Christian system, by treading with cautious steps the path of divine philosophy: his work on the reasonableness of Christianity was levelled at Bayle and the sceptics; but it strikes at Popish dogmatism with equal force, or rather with greater force; for it destroys the common ground upon which scepticism and dogmatism both stand—the abuse of reason. Though not directed to the support of Protestantism, it carried out the genuine principles of the Reformation further than any other work, either before or since; and with all its faults, it is the most valuable contribution that has ever been made to the most important branch of theology, that which treats of the support

which reason lends to faith, and the foundation of faith in the operations of reason and judgment.

Here then is the point, to which the labours of Protestants in the present age, might usefully tend, that the light of Revelation may be kept alive on the earth, without implicit submission or ecclesiastical authority, that religion is consistent with reason, and faith with philosophy. That it is not the genius nor the spirit of Christianity to reduce man to the degradation of moral servitude, to strip human nature of its attributes, Reason of her prerogative. The transmitted voice of antiquity would draw men back to the trance in which superstition lulled their powers during the ages of ignorance ; and once more awake the traditional strain by which that slumber was prolonged beyond its natural period. But Revelation, and the moral constitution of man, brought to light and reflected in the fountain of truth, both demonstrate, that to enslave and shackle the movements of the understanding, is as destructive of the faith

of Christianity, as is the licentiousness which would violate its mysteries. If, in the rapid progression of the human mind, reason, impelled by a vain curiosity, has transgressed or infringed her limits, let the speculative line of demarcation be vigorously traced. Where that line has been trodden down by the wandering imagination of man, let it be restored. If, hastily and unknowingly, the minds of men have become mazed in controversies, to which neither schools nor churches can give any certain decision, let the verge be clearly and steadily viewed, within which human judgment may walk surely, but beyond which, the spirit of inquiry cannot be indulged without presumption. But the imperious bigotry which, like the councils of the Romish Church, canonizes innumerable dogmas, and leaves no latitude for inquiry, is the most dangerous of all remedies in the present temperament of the human mind; and by leaving no play for the faculties, by suppressing the means of conviction and assurance, can hardly fail to engender that

scepticism against which it was directed. To expound and define the right of private judgment in the examination of revealed truth ; to point out where its excess is dangerous, and where its exercise is not only safe, but incumbent on every reasonable being ; to prove that reflection is as necessary to religious belief, as faith to Christian philosophy ; and that the light of revelation may be as entirely intercepted by a standard of orthodoxy, as by the excesses of the most licentious rationalism : these I take to be the lessons of which the present generation stands principally in need. How tradition eclipsed both reason and the gospel, and how ecclesiastical authority afterwards corrupted tradition, the reader may see in another place. But in order to apprehend the nature of the endless struggle between faith and reason, it is necessary to obtain a view of its primary source.

For this purpose, let us remark one of the grandest characteristics of Christianity. The Christian, is the only system of theology which ever incorporated a full and systematic view of the moral constitution of man with

a popular religion ; the only scheme which ever engrafted these public rites and solemnities in which the religious belief of a great body ever declares itself, on clear and definite principles of moral truth. For example, in ancient times, among pagan nations, the science of human nature, the theory of moral sentiment, and all that province of human knowledge which borders on theology, were confined to a few contemplative men ; the religious opinions of the multitude did not go beyond a general belief of a supreme, invisible power, branching into a licentious mythology, and confessed by unmeaning ceremonies and mysteries. Even Jewish antiquity, which exhibits the august spectacle of a theocracy, accompanied its solemnities with the simple table of a moral law ; but offered no manifestation of the character of God, to animate its ceremonial, and illuminate its visible sanctuary ; unless indeed, the prophetic Mosaic economy which dimly prefigured the age of Evangelists and Apostles, be considered such a manifestation. But in pure systems of natural religion, where Rea-

son has been left to her own resources, no example is to be found of a coherent and rational plan of theology or morals blending itself with the popular belief and worship. The reason is plain. Natural theology, that is theism, deduced by philosophical principles from the frame of nature, is too difficult a process, too far beyond the comprehension of the multitude, ever to diffuse or spread itself beyond the few who have leisure for contemplation. Still more abstruse and remote from vulgar apprehension, are the principles of natural morality, which, though agitated in fruitless controversies by the ancient sects, always occupied a region far above the polytheism of the people. Nothing short of divine revelation and its miraculous attestation, can diffuse and familiarize a rationale of belief, or unite in one harmonious system the principles of morals and theology, with the implicit submission and simple solemnities of popular worship. Precepts and oracles from heaven can alone elevate the worship of the people by moral truth. Speculation

among philosophers; superstition among the people; such is ever the condition of moral and religious truth under the reign of natural religion.

In reality, it is impossible for a popular religion, whatever be its rites and solemnities, to incorporate or rest upon clear or definite principles of moral truth, so long as men are ignorant of the character of God, and explore by the dim light of reason the attributes of that invisible Being who is the moral Governor of the world. For the authoritative revelation which he has made of character, as it is the point where morals and religion meet, so does it reduce the peasant and the philosopher to one common ground, and obliging the former to abate somewhat of his indolence, and the latter much of his speculation, produces one coherent system of reasonable faith.

And this brings us to that point in which natural religion and that form of corrupt Christianity which we have been considering, meet together. We have seen that until

Christianity arose, a passive, unmeaning belief, was the condition of the multitude, as a pure rationalism necessarily was the condition of philosophers, under the absence of a divine revelation. But no sooner had divine revelation, by the simple, but authoritative communication of the character and attributes of God, blended moral truth with the popular belief, theology with the moral science of philosophers, thus elevating both, than there immediately resulted that reasonable service, in which submission to divine authority was combined with the operations of the human understanding ; in a word, that mixed system of faith and reason which distinguishes Christianity from all systems of natural religion. The connection and dependency of its various doctrines, the relation of the various ordinances to these and to each other, could not be even comprehended without reason and inquiry, and a state of mind very different from the indolent unconcern in which the votaries of paganism reposed. Christianity mingles with its practical discoveries of the relation of the Creator and creature, no inconsiderable por-

tion of argumentative, not to say abstruse matter; and while it inculcates submission to its mysteries, it, at the same time, awakes the soul from that supine credulity in which the superstition of nature would sink its powers. It is as little fitted to bear communion with Ignorance itself, as it is to consort with Superstition, the daughter of Ignorance. By transferring the rationale of contemplative men to the belief of the multitude, revelation has harmonized the shades of natural religion, and brought into union the sometimes discordant, but in their own nature congenial elements of faith and reason.

It is to the coexistence and reaction of these elements, peculiar to Christianity, with their progressive struggles as circumstances have given reins to either, that all the diversified complexions which the church has assumed, and every wave which has agitated her surface, may be ultimately traced, from the earliest outbreak of Gnosticism under Cerinthus (against whom John levelled his Gospel) to the fanaticism of yesterday, that is only now dying away on the bosom of the

Church. These causes it is, which render the moral and intellectual state of man, under the Christian dispensation, so different from what it was in ancient times and pagan nations. It is this combination of faith with reason, which animates and informs the Christian rites and acts of worship, and constitutes that truly reasonable service, which the Scriptures first brought to light. Above all, it is from the conflict of these two principles, which, though congenial, are yet often at variance, that a state of probation arises, as real as that which springs from the lower infirmities of human nature, and which forms no inconsiderable part of that condition of trial and difficulty which is the lot of man on earth.

Some men incline to Faith; others attach themselves to Reason, according to their tempers, dispositions, and propensities. These two sections or parties, if I may so call them, are the genuine offspring of the Christian system; nor, if the excess and predominance of either principle really exist, does it signify what name or denomination the partisan

bears, or whether he ranges himself under the standard of the Romish or of the Reformed communion. If these two should now be specifically lost in a complete incorporation, the infirmity of human nature would soon find in the complex system of Christianity, a source of division, which, there is very little reason to conclude, it can ever altogether avoid. The balance between Faith and Reason is so delicate, that different opinions must of necessity arise respecting it, even among the pious, as long as men differ in their passions and prejudices. Persons of weak judgment, more especially if sunk in ignorance, will ever circumscribe reason more narrowly, and guard against its encroachments more jealously, than men of enlarged thought, who look with equal jealousy on bigotry, and are prone to magnify the force and compass of the human understanding. Thus are these religious divisions involved in the very nature of Christianity, varying in strength and violence, between which, the Church must ever fluctuate. Nor are these divisions pernicious, so long as they subsist

together in peace, and neither absorb the other ; any more than the parties of a free state are pernicious, which, while they seem to threaten its existence, are the sources of its life and vigour.

After all, this question of Faith and Reason resolves itself into another, viz. By what authority is the word of God to be interpreted? Who is to fix the purport of that communication divinely revealed to man? For upon the mode and kind of authority by which that record is to be expounded, manifestly depends the extent of that which is revelation ; in other words, the limits within which private judgment may be indulged, or implicit submission is required from mankind. This is plainly an arduous question, and one admitting a considerable variety of sentiment. On the one hand, an uncontrolled latitude of private judgment in dealing with the word of Revelation, gives reins to the appetites and passions of mankind, which, disguised under the appearance of argument, will inevitably sway their decision, and lead them to the summary rejection of any doctrine which

offends their prejudices. On the other hand, the large traditional interpretation to which the Church of Rome exacts an implicit assent, lies under the dominion of the same prejudices; and even ecclesiastical authority has not always been exempt from the contagion of earthly passions.

Of all moral questions, those which relate to the proper medium between extremes, are the most difficult and embarrassing. Were human capacity less limited, the limited powers of language would present an almost insurmountable obstacle to the expression of these gradations. I pretend not to strike the speculative line, where faith, exceeding its due limits, contradicts the principles of the Reformation, and begins to endanger the interests of the Protestant religion. The following remarks may, however, assist us in approximating that determinate degree.

1. The principles of Reason and Faith are not necessarily at variance; nor is the struggle between them, the war of discordant elements.

It is a common prejudice, that Faith requires the exclusion of Reason, and that the exercise

of reason is destroyed by faith. Nothing can be more unfounded or dangerous than such a supposition. While these two principles are both in full life and vigour, they not only subsist together, but by their mutual control, support and corroborate each other, and are not only congenial but inseparable principles. Reason is the mother of religious belief; and it is the effect of a clear apprehension to invigorate Faith. For it is the province of the highest order of reason to discern most clearly the limits of his own capacity, and the characteristic of genius to feel instinctively where it can no longer fix its footing, or support its wavering steps. It is from the decline of faith or reason, and the consequent encroachment of one or the province of the other, that these principles ever shock with each other. When Reason is weak, Faith intrudes into her province, *i. e.* draws to herself matters which are plainly within the limits of human observation and experience. When Faith fails, the presumption of human reason is ever ready to invade the province of Faith,

i. e. to argue on matters respecting which human experience and observation can tell nothing, and which are therefore not the subject matter of the operations or conclusions of Reason. In the former case, Faith imposes dogmas *contrary to the conviction* of Reason, as in the case of the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. In the latter, reason impugns the dictate of Revelation simply because it is *above its comprehension*, of which the prevailing scepticism respecting the doctrine of the Trinity affords an example.

2. It may be observed that if, in that conflict, which from these causes frequently arises between Faith and Reason, either principle absolutely prevails, such ascendant is destructive of Christianity: and that one or other has, in point of fact, had an undue ascendant according to the situation of the human understanding in different ages.

In apostolic times, and in the immediately succeeding age, the licentious disquisition of the Greeks gave great grief and dis-

quietude to Paul and his successors, and were the source of the innumerable heresies and schisms which distracted the Eastern branch of the Christian Church for a thousand years. The earliest depravation of the doctrines of Revelation, the heresy of the Gnostics, was the result of the undue ascendant of Reason. In the Western or Latin Church, where there was less force of genius, and less taste for philosophical inquiries, the same presumption in speculation never took place in the same degree. Human reason, depressed by the authority of Councils, and by the growing weight of ecclesiastical discipline, at length slumbered in Gothic barbarism. Religion became exclusively a matter of belief; and there being an end of all judgment, reason, or inquiry, superstition and credulity flowed. Hence the original of the Romish Church, and the rise of that exorbitant authority in matters spiritual, which suppressed reason and perpetuated the abasement of mankind.

Although submission to ecclesiastical authority be no longer the disposition of men's

minds, in the present advanced stage of human society, and the theological dissensions and factions with which some parts of the reformed churches are agitated, present a revolting spectacle ; it must not be forgotten, that there are also dangers in the allurements of the Church of Rome—dangers which are augmented by the contrast of so opposite a scene. A religion so coldly sweet, a religion which fascinates by its dead repose, may by its placid stillness disguise that physiognomy of spiritual death which would else appal ; and in the Church of Rome these traits are so softened, that it is not without difficulty we recognise an inanimate body. But their expression cannot be mistaken on a nearer view ; and we discern in their fixed and unchanging stillness, that the fervor of spirit is quenched, the vital current stopped, the conscience for ever lulled. Fanaticism, whose pulse beats high with the fever of hope or fear, where hurried life throbs in every vein, often gazes on that form of apathy, and envies its deep repose ; and as some are driven by the tumult of their passions to the extinction of animal

life, so the wretched fanatic not unfrequently seeks a lasting rest in that mortality of the affections which the Romish ceremonial opens, and escapes from his troubles and anxious fears, into that last, that inviolable asylum.

FINIS.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY T. BRETTELL, RUPERT STREET, HAYMARKET.



